



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release December 9, 1982

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THREE AGENCIES AGREE ON MANAGEMENT OF FEDERAL AND STATE LANDS ON MATAGORDA ISLAND, TEXAS

Secretary of the Interior James Watt announced today that a 7-year-old dispute between the Federal Government and the State of Texas over jurisdiction of 19,000 acres of Federal property on Matagorda Island has been resolved.

The Secretary said he has signed a memorandum of agreement between the Interior Department and Texas that provides for cooperative management of Federal wildlife refuge lands and adjoining State lands on Matagorda Island. The decision follows a lengthy evaluation of environmental impacts and public participation process, and is designed to preserve the natural characteristics and wildlife values of Matagorda Island.

"This decision is a creative and reasonable solution to a long-standing problem," Secretary Watt said. "The natural resources of Matagorda Island will be protected and enhanced by the addition of over 24,000 acres of valuable wildlife habitat to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The decision satisfies State concerns about Matagorda Island and ensures continuing Federal stewardship of federally protected wildlife resources."

Under the decision the General Services Administration has transferred the 19,000 Federal acres to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Federal lands and 24,893 acres of State wetlands and Gulf lands will be managed as a unit by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The area will be known as "Matagorda Island State Park and Wildlife Management Area" and will be included within the National Wildlife Refuge System under an exchange of conservation easements

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between the Interior Department and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. As a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the area will be managed in accordance with Federal refuge regulations.

The Federal Government will retain primary jurisdiction of the Federal property and acquire a conservation easement on State lands. The remaining 11,500 acres of the island will continue in private ownership. Access to the area will continue to be by boat, and no public airport, bridge, or other connection to the mainland that would allow automobile or aircraft access will be allowed.

The effort to reach a settlement over Matagorda Island has spanned three Administrations and has aroused widespread public interest because of the island's importance as habitat for migratory birds and endangered species. Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, the traditional wintering home of the endangered whooping crane, is located several miles across San Antonio Bay from Matagorda Island. About one-third of the flock crosses the bay to use the island, primarily the State tidelands. These State lands will now be protected under the National Wildlife Refuge Administration act. Other wildlife using the island are brown pelicans and migratory peregrine falcons, also endangered species; American alligators, a threatened species; large numbers of ducks and mourning doves; and resident populations of deer and bobwhite quail.

The 19,000 acres of Federal property on the island are the site of a former Air Force range. Since 1971, this property has been managed by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge under a memorandum of understanding between the Secretaries of the Interior and Air Force. The Air Force declared the property excess to its needs in 1975. Subsequently both the Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Texas applied to GSA requesting jurisdiction of the property. Despite extensive discussions over a period of several years, no agreement was ever reached and the disposition of the property remained unsettled until now.

MATAGORDA ISLAND

CALHOUN CO., TEXAS

